SQUAT IT

Housing is the right of every person Despite this there are thousands of Victorians without decent housing. In a situation where there are homeless people and empty houses, squatting is the immediate answer.

There have been squatters for as long as there's been the concept of owning land, and squatting on land or in buildings which officially belong to somebody else takes place all over the world. For thousands, probably millions, of working class and poor people, particularly in third world countries, it is absolutely basic to their survival.

Not only squatters need know about squatting. Housing for people is an issue that concerns everyone. Squat-ting is a solution-- people get housing, it encourages public aware-ness of the housing crisis.

TRY SQUATTING

facts!

The following figures attempt to show how drastic the crisis is.

- Over 1% of Australians are homeless.
- Over 270,000 Australians are living in either caravans or substandard housing.
- Over 125,000 households in Australia currently are waiting for public housing.
- In the annual Federal budget, the housing category has fallen from 3.9% (1974/'75) of total expenditure to 1.6% (est., 1983/'84) – a decline of 46%. All other areas of social expenditure have shown some increase in real terms.
- In Victoria there are only 42,000 Ministry of Housing homes available for rental to civilians.
- At 30 December 1983, there were almost 23,000 applicants on the Ministry of Housing waiting list.
- Waiting time for Ministry of Housing houses is often six years or more.
- The private rental market is presently extremely tight. Private rents are rising rapidly and are expected to skyrocket in 1984.
- In 1983 the vacancy rate fell to an average of 1.3%. 3.5% is regarded as normal.

FED UP!

Have you got a house? Or are you one of the thousands (87,000 in Vic alone) who are effected by the housing crisis.

The housing crisis is caused by many things;inflated rent markets no rent control,discrimination by landlords and estate agents (discrimination based on income is legal in Vic) but I feel one of the main causes is the inefficient handling of the public housing stock.

The Ministry Of Housing is the worst offender in regards of not filling it's houses quickly,efficiently and fairly. The beauracratic bungling of the MOH and other relevent governement ministries should go down in history as an example of how not to handle a housing crisis.

Time and time again governement houses are found empty,and after investigation are found to have been empty for many months (some well over a year). There was a case of this in Williamstown where 18 MOH houses had been"forgotten"by the MOH. Another more current example is the Ascot Vale estate where 20 flats stand vacant and have infact become derelict. This sort of situation is happening on a massive scale throughout melbourne and all of Vic. It is as bad if not worse in other states EG: Sydney's Glebe estate.

The problem seems to lay mainly in the bureaucratic process which is slow and inefficient. It is hampered by red tape,lack of communication between governement depts, and the laziness of the powermongers at the top of the hierarchy.

At a meeting on the 23rd of Oct between members of the SU(squatter's union),John Cullen(acting director of the MOH),David McKutchin and a ministriel advisor they calmly admitted that the MOH processes were slow and cumbersome,but when pressed for an explanation for this,they quicly stated that the meeting was not for the purpose of debating MOH housing policy.

Improvement of the handling of the public housing stock can only come through the dismantling of the whole process.The hierarchical structure needs to be pulled down to it's very foundations and reorganised to be as fair and as streamlined as possible,given the current crisis situation.

One part of doing this would be to abolish the priority system. The way of judgement of need is unfair and does not improve the allocation process at all. It doesn't help those in crisis any more than those on the normal waiting list. What it does do however,is to encourage people to put themselves in more desperate situationsin an attempt to get emergency housing. Getting within priority guidelines is nearly impossible as the case of the womyn with 7 children will outline. The womyn and her children were living in a tiny caravan paying exorbitant rent and yet they were refused priority on two occasions. Another more common problem arising from priority housing is that it consists mainly of highrise appartements which are totally inadequate for most peoples needs. Ther is also a minimum of 3 mths wait for this pitiful band-aid solution.

Another part of the resructuring could be the introduction of short life housing. This isvery successful in England and parts of Europe. It utilises buildings which would otherwise remain empty for mths,maybe yrs. At the moment all houses bought by the MOHremain empty until upgrading/maintenance is complete, which takes many monthes. The introduction of short life housing would eliminate this wastage by making these houses available to homelesspeople on short term leases..... to be continued (somewhere in this Newssheet)

I feel the only fair way to distribute the available housing stock at the moment is through a self help system where people are taught to get things for themselves instead of continuing to uphold the welfare "wait turn"system which is currently being used. The idea behind this is to motivate people to find their own houses and to renovate and upgrade them themselves. This would promote independence and put a stop to the powerlessness which goes hand in hand with the welfare system.

Squatting, in fact, could easily be seen as an illegal (technically) form of self help and/or Short Life Housing. Many families who would otherwise be on the streets, have found many months of accommodation in houses which would alternatively remain empty awaiting renovation, upgrading or demolition (for carparks).

Many people squat to pressure the government into doing something about it's ridiculous system so that public housing becomes as accessible as it should be, others squat for a home. Squatting is a viable housing alternative and has and will continue to grow along side the housing crisis. It happens in almost all states and in smoe states (NSW and Victoria for example) a squatting network has been organised to help to get and fight for their squats/homes.

The Squatters Union in Melb. has been going for some years now and although it is not necessary to deal with them when you are or are intending to squat, they are happy to provide much needed info.

The Squatters Union is basically an infomation network based on the self-help ideal. The S.U. can provide addresses of empty houses, (limited no's of those unfortunately), info. on how when and who, legal advice and representation at the Residential Tenancies Tribunal (if requested) and any other squatting info. you require. The S.U. currently has dealing with 64 squats in and around Melb. and this is only a small representation of the total number of squats in operation today.

Although it is not necessary to be politically motivated to squat (many people squat simply because they need immediate housing), squatting is in itself a political statement. It is a refusal to continue to accept oppressive welfare handout system and simply takes what is everybodies basic right, housing.

Until the major reorganisation of the public housing system comes into the realms of reality (whem the beaureucrats lose their power), squatting will continue to increase in answer to the desperate plea for housing. With it will grow the pressure on the government to open it's eyes and see the obvious solutions to the current crisis.

The two solutions outlined here are obviously not the only ones but I think they are both necessary, on their own or preferably in combination with other changes, eg. staffing reorganisation, unnecessary paperwork stopped and the streamlining of the whole allocation process.

So if you need housing, can't get it ... DON'T DESPAIR.... SQUAT !!!!!

today at the Residential tenancies tribunal.....
Where do these people come from?
you mustn't think I'm Not sympathetic
but I'm Just doing my Job
Sob Sob
Min of Housing
Where is your concience when We Need it

GOWER ST SQUATS VS MIN OF HOUSING

On the 23rd of October the squatters from Gower Street were taken, by the Ministry of Housing to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal.

Below you will find a brief outline of the case, which is an example of the way the MOH handles the eviction of squatters.

There were 6 cases for order of possession made by the MOH.

21 "cross-claims" for tenancy under section 135 of the tenancies act. (Under section 135 you need to prove that the hardship suffered by you having to move out, is greater than the hardship suffered by the Ministry if they allowed you to stay as tenants.)

All cases were heard as a household but due to the claims for tenancy, each individual form each household had the opportunity to state their individual case.

1ST CASE: 49- Chris, Colin, Trevor, John. All pleaded hardship on the grounds of homelessness but were refused on the grounds that the MOH would suffer more through letting them stay. They were given 2 weeks.

2ND CASE: 53- Lesley, Jatz. Pleaded hardship and stated that Gower St wasthere principel place of residence. They also stated that they were willing to pay a reasonable rent and would keep the place in order. The waiting list argument won out again. They were given 2weeks.

3RD CASE: 55- Chris, Kat, Abey, Sara. This one took longer as a complication arose concerning Chris who is only 16. This concerned the the Referee but the MOH stated that Chris was eligible to apply for shared housing. They too were given 2 weeks.

4TH CASE: 57- Herve, Rowan, Brent. At this stage we had realised we were fighting a lost battle and the emphasis turned to a political arena. We had long drawn out discussions with the referee about section 135 and how hopeless it was but in the end we ended up with what everyone elsegot, 2 weeks.

5TH CASE: 59- Noone from 59 was present so they were granted 2 weeks on the strength of the other verdicts.

6TH CASE: 47- Representeed by Peter. This case had a new twist because there were children involved and the family has been on the waiting list for over a year. A very small victory was won in the fact that this household was granted 3 weeks instead of 2.

The RTT hearing was not a complete loss as valuable lessons were learned.

(1) Representing yourself is a good idea as it gives you ample opportunity to make political statements which a lawyer is not allowed to do. Legal advice, however, is ESSENTIAL.

(2) Section 135 has potential in regards to private dwellings and other government depts whose houses are not on the public housing lists.

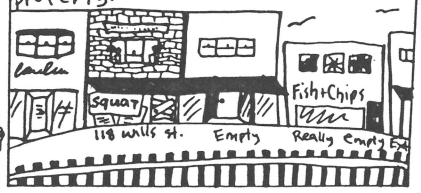
(3) A strong argument needs to be formulated against the 'waiting list, queue jumping' case put up by the MOH.

These cases also reinforce the fact that you wont (in most cases) be evicted from a MOH house without first going through the Resi. Ten. Trib. There have been a few cases where people have been evicted from MOH houses, but this is due to the squatters not securing the houses properly or leaving it unsecured while they go out for "five minutes."

the setting is familiar carefully trimmed lawns - Hedges + ferns, 1948's So calm, so placid, so Bored. But something Happened, not Longago Something so Remarkable it changed the lives of those who knew the Truth! This Then is:

SQUATTING in the Suburbs or the GLENIRIS story

We were squatting in the path of a freeway No-one seemed to want. The freeway was at least 4 months from needing our house we disturbed no-one - the house next door on the right being empty and the house to the left being Noisier than us. Friends were squatting around the corner in another Road Construction Authority property.

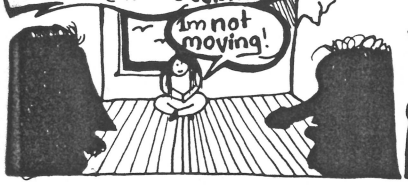


One morning - shortly after our Neibors in 1561 High st had secured their Squat....

Wed 19 June
sorry to wake you do, but We think the RCA will make a move to day and Linda will be on her own - will you go and stay with her till I get back?
Sure!
Miaw

He was wrong in one important detail - The RCA Moved on MY HOUSE

David was arrested when he went back inside our house after the RCA kicked him out. I helped the RCA men Pack up our belongings - going in and out several times - and looked for our Poor Cats. When All our things had been Removed I went into our favourite room and sat down. I thought about a lot of things and came to a decision.....



So I was arrested too. Being Questioned - not answering, being Put in the lock up, being Photographed and Fingerprinted, going to court next morning - being fined $100 each all seemed like a bad dream. so I won't go into it in detail - ugh!

When I got back to 1561 Highst (my new Home) There were lots of people in the lounge room. Most of them from the S.U. They wanted ACTION - and fast.

So they stormed minister Mr Roper's office and made demands - they were agreed to

MEANWHILE, the R.C.A. TRASHED our house. 118

Meetings were arranged between the Ministry of Housing the R.C.A. and the squatters union. We discover that we don't speak the same language

THEY GAVE us THE Assurance, though, that there would be No Evictions. So David and I squatted a House in Thornbury Cresent owned by the R.C.A. It was a very Posh house with pink Marble every where and Rose carpeting.

WE WERE Evicted the Next day.

At the Next Meeting with the MOH and RCA we made demands that David + My fines be payed, that the Empty RCA Houses be made Known + Available for short life housing and that the Vandalism of Empty houses be stopped. We also asked why we were evicted and not Negotiated with. They didn't say "NO" to our demands but tried to Water them down and get around them - also they said they did negotiate - they told Western Regional Housing Group that we were going. That's Negotiation? So we'd had ENOUGH. WE WALKED OUT They didn't weep with Remorse!

Some Angry + Reckless Individuals took it upon themselves to do some Direct Action on RCA Vehicles one Night

David and My Fines were drawing Near by this time and we recalled a certain Mr Jim Stevenson, Ministerial advisor to Mr TOM Roper promising, if the worst come to the worst, to pay them himself! So We Rang him up.

The Squatters Union decided to join forces with the Gardeners Creek Action Group in some decisive Action, even though they were all very Middle class in their Values and had some FUNNY Ideas. Eg. Squatting Half demolished Houses. (they didn't Like the Proposed FREEWAY for ENVIRONMENTAL reasons Mostly) unfortunately we haven't quite Co-ordinated this great and World shattering Action Yet we still haven't paid our $100 fines yet either, let them find me.

When the 60 days was almost over the RCA took us to the residential tenancies Trib. their hardship as they saw it, was greater than ours as homeless people because our being in High st was costing them thousands.

The Judge dismissed the case - We were staying

Some Liberal Members came to get some political mileage out of our plight. He brought his own Media people.

You are illegally occupying this if it was up to me, I'd come down with the cops and help them Kick you out on the minister responsible for allowing you to stay fired!
I think it's a cain gout to soft on squatters other poor people dont resort to crime when your parents
Is this guy for Real?
Woof?

by the time the 60 days was up, it was only Lynda and Me left in the house. When they banged on the door we stalled them, knowing we could stay till they got an Order of Possession - it would take a week. But they offerred us a Moving Van! For FREE!

THEY trashed that House that Night. It was demolished in a few days and Left a Pile of Rubble for MONTHS. 27th August.

As far as I am CONCERNED, for Beurocratic Bungling, boxed in "I'm only doing my job" mentality and PURE spite you can't go past the RCA!

I WON'T be squatting any more of their properties Just yet but something should be done about these bastards, and all others who try to Wreck your Life. Organize with others Activate for the Kind of Life you Want. If we don't do it Who will? Any way, That was the Glen Iris story. Story's like it go on every day - but this one happened to me so I feel qualified to write and draw about it. THE END

06.85

SQUATTING: A Social Romance

What's Happening?

One used to assume it was a position one assumed when toilets were few and voyeurs even fewer. However, I discovred squatting made reference to more than poor potty training and sheep growers.

Half way through last year, I found myself without accommodation and having no money when my home was overtaken. The all-too-friendly RE agent refused to fumigate, seized the bond, changed the locks and caught a train to Mentone on the proceeds. All of which was illegal but...overthrows don't only happen in the Kremlin.

After seeking temporry refuge with a friend I successfully hunted down a squatter I once spoke to. Squatting sounded romantic enough; even an adventure. Now it was a matter of necessity, financial and otherwise.

And so I moved into my first squat and the romantic ideal set as soon as the sun did.

Hard living, loved ones.

Why shouldn't I live in a place that had been empty for two years when I had no other reasonable choice? God knows, after paying advance rent, bond money, compulsory union fees and scrounging text books, there wasn't much left for the sampling of Lygon Street nouveau cuisine. If you're there God, I hope that your're listening.

And so my social conscience awoke, metaphysical guilt gripped the very core of my dialectic mind. I discovered Marxism came in as many varieties as Heinz baby foods and also the nutritional content of a two week old 'Big Mac'. I learnt how to relaunder tram tickets and to catch the lift down from Level 4 at 9.15 in order to go up.

But I learnt many other things too. Hidden hypocrisies and intrinsic confusion was not only a mental state of my own. The governments scope and ability in this realm of inaptitude belittled my efforts into self-indulgent grandiosement by comparison.

Governments prefer to demolish and vandalise houses rather than to let people live in them. At the moment the RCA is destroying houses they own in Glen Iris rather than leave them empty. Telecom and the Ministry of Housing (MOH), having a particularly proud ascetic expertise in toilet vandalization and floor removal. Meanwhile, in excess of 125,000 people rot on MOH waiting lists as government departments let empty houses that they own rot.

The Victorian Squatters Union is there to highlight this wasteful hypocrisy, to utilize these empty homes and to fight for affordable decent housing. It is staffed by volunteer help (moi par-example) and subsists solely on public donations (215 Victoria Parade, Collingwood, ph: 419 0047). We'll accept nearly anything; we do not accept Bankcard, Mastercard, American Express et cetera however. So sorry.

Squatting is a valid and justified means of overcoming the affordable housing shortage and wasteage. The VSU provides as many services as possible and has a manual "Opening Doors" assessing the viability of squatting and how to go about it. It is available at the office of the VSU.

You can help by notifying the VSU of any empty homes left vacant longer than three months, telephone 419 0047.

Remember: SQUAT, DON'T LET IT ROT.

JUST A JOB.

They came the other day , two of them from he Ministry of Housing. They arrived in a pasty coloured hatchback, with their suits, brown shoes, and their air of capable impersonality. They had come, they said, to invest--igate the situation and come to some sort of understanding.

There wasn't much for them to say, so they just repeated themselves, sounding like some sort of 20 minute loop tape. We asked them questions, challenged their system of housing, pointed out major shortcomings. All in vain, wasted words against the tirade of governmental bullshit which flowed from their lips.

"Have you applied for housing? no? Then your not eligible are you?"

"We can't condone queue jumping,can what would I tell the other people on the waiting lists?"(probably the same lies you've been telling them for years!!) "What if everyone started squatting?".... I wonder!!!. "NO NO, you must sign up and wait your eternity. That's the way it's always been done."

On and on it went, their feeble reasons and justifications for taking away our home. Evict the homeless to house the homeless, an exercise in stupidity!!!.

So we talked and talked, 28,000 homeless families, waiting lists, priority, HUNDREDS of empty houses. "None in our area" Isn't there?

More talk, new questions, same answers. Same patronising (sympathetic?) lies. Boredom sets in, our feet were getting cold, so we said goodbye and they left, satisfied, their job done, their desk clear, and their conscience

They had said, "You must go!", we said "We must stay!"

They were satsfied, they had told us, they had done their job. We'll probably never see them again, those two who came to see us.

Just another day at the office, just routine!!

NOT FOR US!!!!

EVENTS MEETINGINGS ACTIONS PLACES BENIFIT GIGS HAPPENINGS AND ETC

St KILDA COMMUNITY YOUTH FESTIVAL;7th DECEMBER 12pm-8pm ALMA PARK YOUTH GROUPS UNEMPLOYMENT HOUSING ISSUES STALLS AND MUSIC

ENERGY ACTION GROUP:MEETING 11AM 7th NOVEMBER Brotherhood of St Laurence St. Brunswick St. Fitzroy MORE CONCERNING DISCRIMINATING DISCONECTION DISCONNECTIONS.CONTACT THE BROTHERHOOD OF St LAURENCE TO KEEP YOUR POWER ON HOUSE WARM AND FOOD COOKED.

FESTIVAL COBURG COMMUNITY FESTIVAL UNEMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING COBURG LAKE INFOMATION DAY SUNDAY 17th NOVEMBER STALLS & FOOD

SHELTER WORKSHOPS--WORKING WITH THE ALP-NOVEMBER 19&26&DEC 3 FITZROY FOOTBALL GROUND COMMUNITY ROOMS BRUNSWICK ST FITZROY CONTACT ROBYN FOR FURTHER INFO & REGISTRATION.CHILD CARE AVAILABLE TELEPHONE 417 6777

PEOPLE AGAINST ID NUMBERS (P.A.I.N.)MEETING EVERY MONDAY 6pm ROOM 10 3rdFLOOR YWCA ELIZABETH ST CITY OR 49 PEEL ST WEST MELB. PHONE 328 4988

TENANTS UNION 419 5577-FOR ALL YOUR LANDLORD PROBLEMS

FITZROY MARKET STILL SURVIVES COUNCIL BASHINGS.NEW LOCATION AT THE OLD FIRE STATION 301 St GEORGES RD FITZROY.EVERY SATURDAY FREE STALLS EVERYONE WELCOME NOTHING BANNED! Admission is Free.

DOWN TO EARTH CONFEST JANUARY 1986 24th-26th ph 6631561

UNEMPLOYED WORKERS UNION 301St GEORGES RD FITZROY PH 4811155

GIRLS WANNA HAVE FUN DAY 23 NOVEMBER WARRAWEE PARK,DRUMMOND ST &ARTHERTON RD OAKLEIGH 10am to 6pm ph 568 4172

THERE NO PLACE LIKE HOME-- IF YOUVE GOT ONE!! POVERTY SUMMITS No 4 NOVEMBER THE 10th WEST HEIDELBERG COMMUNITY CENTRE AT 9.45am

ANARCHIST BOOKSHOP/cafe/LIBRARY BENEFIT AT THE SYDENHAM HOTEL ON 16th NOVEMBER $3/5 employed &/or BRING BOOKS,RECORDS ETC

NEXT SQUATTERS UNION MEETING TO BE HELD AT 215 VICTORIA PDE AT 4.30pm WED 6th November & every fortnight after that. WED

If You want more copies of this fab Publication - Put this one on A photo copier!

the squatters union of victoria is a volunteer based group which relies on public support, donations, information sharing and participation. if you know of empty houses, want to give monetary substances, have spare furniture or want to participate in any way contact S.U.V. on: ph: 419 0047 or call in at 215 victoria parade, collingwood. (we even have access to a coffee machine).